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SUBJECT: PM SPEAKS TO AMBASSADOR AND COMMANDING GENERAL IN
WAKE OF SAMARA BOMBING

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: During Prime Minister Maliki's June 14 meeting with Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus, he said that the latest Golden Dome bombing showed Al Qaeda continues to attack holy sites to foment sectarian discord, making it critical to ensure that key shrines will be adequately protected in the future. Ambassador Crocker emphasized the importance of the calming steps already taken by Maliki, noting the positive effect of his meeting with the Presidency Council, and pressed Maliki to ensure that the curfew and vehicle ban was maintained until the danger further diminished. Maliki responded the curfew would be extended to Sunday, at which point it would be reviewed daily. General Petraeus suggested that the media be invited to the signing of the agreement to rebuild the Golden Dome mosque and that Iraqi leaders increase their media engagement concurrently with the increasing pace of security operations against Al Qaeda set to begin on June 15.

¶2. (S) The leaders also discussed the need to move forward swiftly on hydrocarbons legislation. Maliki indicated that Mashhadani was likely to retain his role as Speaker of the Council or Representatives. Finally, they agreed on a compromise formula for allowing vehicle traffic on Abu Nuwas Street -- where some Western media outlets are located. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (S) Maliki began by voicing hope that the risk of violent reaction to the destruction of the minarets at the Golden Dome shrine in Samara had waned. Maliki said that the attacks again demonstrated that the terrorists view the holy sites as key targets in their effort to foment sectarian discord. Maliki said that Al Qaeda understands it will be forced out of Iraq if it cannot provoke communal tension. Al Qaeda attacks infrastructure, oil and electricity related targets in order to weaken public confidence in the government, he said, but the sectarian issue was vital to Al Qaeda's continued existence in Iraq. He noted that an intercepted letter to Bin Laden had made clear Zarqawi's belief that Al Qaeda could not operate in Iraq unless Shia and Sunni were brought into conflict.

¶4. (S) Al Qaeda would continue to try to provoke the sectarian conflict upon which it depended by attacking holy sites, Maliki predicted. He said that Iraqis once felt the presence of these sites was a blessing upon Iraq, however, if they could not be protected, the holy sites would become a curse. The shrines in Samara, Najaf, Karbala and Baghdad's Khadamiya had religious significance to both Sunni and Shia. In addition, they were a major source of tourism and economically important to the country. The security forces must protect them.

¶5. (S) Ambassador Crocker agreed that the extra security the

Prime Minister had ordered deployed to Samara was important. The tone of the statements made after the attack on the Golden Dome by the Prime Minister, Sistani and others had also been significant. The Ambassador noted the positive outcome of the Prime Minister's meeting with the Presidency Council, a body that represents all of Iraq's major communities. Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus agreed that while Maliki had taken the correct remedial action, the danger had not yet passed. Maliki agreed, noting that was why he had extended the curfew and postponed students' examinations. He said the curfew would be extended to Sunday, and then reviewed each day. (Note: The curfew ended on Sunday morning.)

¶ 6. (S) Maliki shared his suspicion that the Samara attack had been an inside job by the Mosque's security force, members of the Facilities Protection Service who were quartered near the minarets. General Petraeus agreed that this was a possibility. He noted that he had recently visited Samara and had observed the ample security presence, with police cars all around the shrine.

¶ 7. (SBU) Maliki revealed that at the time of the Samara bombing he had been discussing Samara and planning to sign the agreement with UNESCO and a Turkish contractor to rebuild the Golden Dome Mosque. General Petraeus suggested that going ahead with the signing of the agreement in a public ceremony would be a good way to demonstrate Iraqi resolve. It would also be useful to highlight the role of the Turkish contractor. Maliki agreed that this would be useful.

¶ 8. (S) Maliki opined that contractors would not be able to carry out their work if security was inadequate. Security must be in place in Samara within days, he said, so that a UNESCO-linked company could begin the preparations for

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rebuilding, including removing treasures and artifacts from the shrine. Work on the shrine was set to begin in early July. He said that President Bush had called him the previous night to state that the US would pay for the rebuilding expenses. Ambassador Crocker reinforced the desirability of arranging a public signing ceremony with international media coverage.

¶ 9. (S) Maliki said that the first new Iraqi troops to be dispatched to Samara had arrived that morning. Assuring that security was in place was vital as rebuilding Samara was an important element of national reconciliation. Maliki said that one new Army brigade would secure the Baghdad-Samara road and another National Police Brigade -- to be commanded by General Adnan Thabit would protect the city and its environs. An Army Battalion would complement Thabit's force in the city, he added. Until those units are ready, the city would be secured by a deployment of forces from the 6th Brigade.

¶ 10. (S) Maliki commented that the people and Sheikhs of the principal thirteen tribal groups of Samara were intimidated by Al Qaeda. If adequate security could be deployed there, the people would resist Al Qaeda, he said. General Petraeus said that coalition forces would significantly raise the tempo of operations against Al Qaeda within the next days. These simultaneous operations would take place across a broad area.

¶ 11. (C) Ambassador Crocker indicated that Kurdish leader Barzani had agreed to support a compromise proposal on hydrocarbons legislation and the next step was to bring the two draft bills to parliament. Maliki agreed, disclosing that there were still some reservations about revenue sharing. He pressed for the two elements of the Hydrocarbons legislation -- the legal framework and revenue distribution -- to be put together as a package and submitted to the Council of Representatives. Maliki undertook to work on it. He indicated that it could pass quickly through the Council

of Representatives, with first and second readings were scheduled only two days apart, it could be done in a week.

¶12. (C) Maliki disclosed that Council of Representatives Speaker Mashhadani -- who places obstacles to the Hydrocarbon and other useful legislation -- would not be removed from his leadership position. A political agreement had been reached within the Sunni parties to retain him as Speaker. Maliki commented that it was good that the Sadr faction had withdrawn from the Council in reaction to the Samara bombing.

¶13. (C) General Petraeus reviewed progress in economic reconstruction in the area around Baghdad's Abu Nuwas Street.

This prompted Maliki to agree that the barriers on the street could be partially removed to allow traffic to circulate, leaving the final section where the international media outlets were located closed to vehicle traffic but open to pedestrians.

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